

Laramie Meeting Summary

What Is Working Well in Laramie

- **Hospital and Health System:** Iverson Memorial Hospital is considered a great asset, providing high-quality care, excellent patient services, and superb access. Attendees praised the staff's helpfulness and the hospital's innovative hiring of Physician Assistants (PAs), Nurse Practitioners (NPs), and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs).
- **Specialized and Coordinated Care:** The coordination between various local providers is fantastic. Specific successes include the neonatal intensive care unit, expanded urgent care services, and Iverson becoming the state's first Age-Friendly Health System with an integrated geriatric team.
- **Community Resources:** Laramie benefits from valuable resources including the Downtown Clinic, a local hospice facility, home health companies, and the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND).
- **Mental Health Initiatives:** The collaboration between mental health services and law enforcement, including a 24/7 crisis intervention caseworker, was highlighted as a major positive.
- **Provider Scope and Education:** Wyoming's full scope of practice for providers like NPs is seen as a significant strength. The community also benefits from having nursing schools at both the University of Wyoming and Laramie County Community College.
- **Collaborative Culture:** A strong collaborative spirit exists between the hospital, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and home health agencies, all focused on patient well-being. The community also fosters a culture of health through its parks, trails, and support networks.

What Is Not Working Well in Laramie

- **Cost and Coverage:** The escalating cost of healthcare—including insurance premiums, co-pays, and prescriptions—is considered unsustainable for individuals. Insurance coverage for mental health services is inadequate, resulting in high out-of-pocket expenses.
- **Access to Specific Care:**
 - **Senior Care:** The local skilled nursing facility is perceived as being of low quality, and there is no quality memory care facility, forcing residents to seek care out of state.
 - **Mental Health:** There is a severe shortage of mental health services for children, with waiting lists up to six months long. A lack of providers for medication management also creates gaps in care for adults.
 - **Dental Care:** Very few dental providers accept Medicaid, leaving many adults without access to necessary dental care, which negatively impacts their overall health.
- **Workforce Shortages and Strain:**
 - Local nursing schools cannot produce enough nurses to meet demand.

- EMS and volunteer fire departments suffer from inadequate funding, making it difficult to recruit and retain staff.
- Laramie's healthcare system is already overbooked and is expected to become more strained as it absorbs patients from surrounding communities that are losing services.
- **Systemic Issues:**
 - **Siloed Care:** Healthcare services are often siloed, with a lack of integrated care where primary and mental health providers collaborate on patient cases.
 - **Service Communication:** There is poor communication to the public about what services are available, and many residents struggle with transportation to get to appointments.
 - **Suicide Crisis:** Wyoming's consistently high suicide rate is a major concern, with a feeling that the issue is not being proactively addressed.
 - **Reimbursement and Billing:** Frustrations with billing, insurance denials, and the reimbursement process negatively impact the patient experience, even when the clinical care was good.

What Laramie Needs

- **Workforce Development and Support:**
 - Establish post-graduate residency programs for Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants to better prepare them for rural practice and improve retention.
 - Increase funding for nursing programs and create financial incentives to keep graduates practicing in Wyoming.
 - Find ways to attract and retain more healthcare providers by fostering a culture of "joyful practice" and providing them with necessary resources.
 - Advance EMS education across the state to the paramedic level to improve pre-hospital emergency care.
- **Expanded Services and Facilities:**
 - A new, high-quality skilled nursing facility and a quality memory care facility.
 - More accessible treatment options for substance use disorder.
 - Increased resources and providers for pediatric mental health.
 - Development of mental health clubhouses to provide step-down care and prevent isolation.
- **Systemic and Financial Solutions:**
 - **Increase Medicaid Reimbursement:** Raise reimbursement rates across the board, especially for dental care, to incentivize more providers to accept Medicaid patients.
 - **Improve Telehealth:** Invest in telehealth infrastructure, including addressing provider cross-state licensure, offering technical assistance to clinics, and ensuring patients have the necessary equipment and broadband access.

- **Create a Centralized Navigation System:** Develop a better system, such as a central phone number or patient navigators, to help people find the appropriate services and reduce misuse of emergency services.
- **Funding for EMS:** Secure a stable funding source for pre-hospital EMS and volunteer departments.
- **Proactive Suicide Prevention:** Launch a serious, large-scale initiative to reduce Wyoming's suicide rate.